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**From:** County Executive [mailto:SXOCountyExecutive@co.snohomish.wa.us]

**Sent:** Thursday, March 09, 2006 4:00 PM

**Subject:** Pioneers in Conservation: Update / Letters of support needed

Thank you again to those of you who were able to join us on December 7 to discuss Pioneers in Conservation. I would like to take a moment to fill you in on where things currently stand and request your help in securing funding to continue this vital service.

We have been working since last fall with Jim Kramer of Shared Strategy for Puget Sound, Don Stuart of American Farmland Trust and many others to develop a grant program to provide funding for farmers who want to undertake salmon recovery projects on their farms. Our hope is that Pioneers in Conservation will help salmon, but also help farmers stay in business and meet their financial goals. Thanks to funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nature Conservancy, we tested this idea in a pilot project in 2005. The response from farmers was very enthusiastic, with four times as many proposals received as could be funded.

The focus of our meeting in December was on whether we should pursue federal funding to maintain and expand Pioneers in Conservation. While there was a great deal of support for the concept, some attendees expressed concerns about duplication of effort with existing farm conservation programs and the possibility that Pioneers in Conservation could take federal funding away from other conservation programs.

I have been very satisfied with the results of the continued work on these issues.

With regard to coordinating Pioneers in Conservation with other farm conservation efforts, we are pleased to welcome the Washington State Conservation Commission and the Conservation Districts as partners in reviewing and selecting projects and administering the program. Their involvement will ensure that Pioneers in Conservation projects are closely linked with other farm conservation initiatives. Regarding competition for funding, we have been assured that Pioneers in Conservation funding will not come at the expense of other Washington farm conservation programs. Furthermore, we have informed our congressional delegation that our support for Pioneers in Conservation is contingent on maintaining current funding for other farm conservation efforts.

We are now ready to move forward with securing funding for Pioneers in Conservation – and we need your help. We are requesting \$5 million through the Natural Resources Conservation Service in the U. S. Department of Agriculture budget. The federal budget is tight and it will take extra effort by the Washington congressional delegation to get Pioneers in Conservation funded. They need to hear from us that it is worthwhile and widely supported throughout the state.

Please take a few minutes today to write a letter of support to your congressional representatives for Pioneers in Conservation. I am enclosing a briefing paper on Pioneers in Conservation, key points for your letter and contact information for the Washington State congressional delegation. Your letter of support is likely to make the difference in whether this great new service survives. Please do not hesitate to contact Jim, Don or me if there is anything more we can do to help get the message to our representatives in D.C.

Thank you for your help and your partnership in making Pioneers in Conservation a success.

Sincerely,

Aaron Reardon  
Snohomish County Executive

## **Pioneers in Conservation: A Proposed Grant Program to Help Farmers and Support Conservation Actions on Puget Sound Farms**

**Purpose:** This program will both promote the viability of farming in Puget Sound and encourage the implementation of projects and practices that benefit salmon, other fish and wildlife species, and water quality. It will also help implement the creative approach for agriculture and salmon recommended in the Puget Sound Chinook Recovery Plan developed by the Shared Strategy for Puget Sound.

**Background:** This program follows the successful Pioneers in Conservation pilot program implemented by the Shared Strategy of Puget Sound, the American Farmland Trust, and The Nature Conservancy and funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in 2005. Despite tight application deadlines and a modest outreach effort, the pilot program received proposals for more than \$3.3 million in on-farm conservation projects for the \$521,000 in available funding.

**The Proposed Program:** To ensure long-term continuity of the program, this effort will be implemented by the Washington State Conservation Commission through the twelve Puget Sound conservation districts. Funding will support a competitive grants program to award funding to on-farm conservation projects to install buffers, restore fish passage, improve water quality, increase in-stream flows, and provide other environmental benefits. Funding will also be available for purchase of development rights and conservation easements on farms. Project proposals will be solicited from individual farmers, agencies and organizations that serve the Puget Sound farm community. Proposals will be ranked based on feasibility, environmental and conservation benefit, benefits to farm viability, community support and match. Each federal dollar will be matched with at least fifty-cents from a non-federal source. The program will complement other farm conservation programs but will focus on getting funding to on-the-ground projects as quickly and simply as possible. Interim and final reports will be prepared for the program.

**Funding Need:** At the requested funding level of \$5 million, the program will be able to fund 25 to 50 projects in the region (assuming an average grant of \$100,000 to \$200,000 per project). This level of funding is consistent with the high level of interest expressed in the Pioneers pilot program.

**Endorsements:** The proposed program has been endorsed by the Puget Sound Shared Strategy, the American Farmland Trust, and The Nature Conservancy.

**Further Information:** For further information about this proposal, please contact Don Stuart of the American Farmland Trust (253-446-9384), Jim Kramer of the Puget Sound Shared Strategy (206-447-8635), or Len Barson of the Nature Conservancy (206-343-4345 ext. 314).

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